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NEWS BRIEFS

PM's public meet at Companiganj today

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will address a public meeting at the Bashurhat College ground under Companiganj thana of Noakhali district at 10.30 am today, reports UNB.

AL public meet May 4

The Awami League will hold a public meeting at Bangabandhu Avenue on May 4 at 3 pm. Party chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting and deliver important speech. The public meeting will be preceded by an extended meeting of the central working committee on May 2, reports UNB.

JP presidium meets today

The presidium meeting of the Jatiya Party will be held at the Gulshan residence of JP acting Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury at 7 pm today, reports UNB.

Frequent hartals pushing country backward: PM

BHOLA, Apr 26: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today expressed her dismay that the Opposition were pushing the nation backward through frequent hartal calls, reports UNB.

"When the country is marching towards development, the Opposition are calling for hartals and resorting to destructive activities that will push the country backward", she told a big public meeting here.

She said the Opposition, which has no programmes, did nothing for the people when they had been in power. "Now when they are in the Opposition, they are not cooperating with the government's development efforts", she said.

Addressing the public meeting at Bhola government high school ground, she further said the Opposition was telling lies and resorting to false propaganda against the BNP government.

She said her government does not believe in "lip service... we truly believe in work".

Referring to the Opposition allegation of politicisation, the Prime Minister said, "if the people's welfare-oriented programmes of the government are called politicisation, then we will keep on doing this".

"We are constructing cyclone shelters for protecting the people from natural disasters. We are spreading education a prosperous future. Are these politicisation?", Begum

Zia said. He called upon the people to come forward and rally round the BNP government in the greater interest of the nation.

Presided by district BNP president Advocate Mozammel Huq, the meeting was addressed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder, State Minister for Irrigation Mo-sharraf Hossain Shahjahan, Major (Retd) Hafiz MP, Roushan Ara Hena MP, Bhola poushava chairman Golam Nabi Alamgir, JCD general secretary Nazimuddin Alam and a number of local leaders.

The local leaders urged the Prime Minister to meet their
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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia looking at a model of the 33 KV cable extension over the Tetulia river which linked Bhola with the national energy grid yesterday. —Star photo

Hata fails to form govt

TOKYO, Apr 26: Japan's fractious ruling coalition, rocked by the withdrawal of the social Democratic Party overnight, failed to form a cabinet today after parliament elected Tsutomu Hata as Prime Minister, reports AFP.

The chairmen and secretary-general of the coalition parties huddled in the evening after failing to persuade the Socialists to return to the eight-month-old alliance.

They confirmed to postpone the formation of a cabinet until at least tomorrow and agreed to meet again the next morning, party officials said.

Meanwhile, Japan's top trade union boss was quoted as saying today that the possibility of a snap election was 'strong' following the decision of the Social Democratic Party (SDP)

to leave the ruling coalition.

"Without the participation of the SDP, major policies will not pass the House of Representatives," Jiji Press quoted Trade Union Confederation (RENGO) Chairman Akira Yamagishi as telling a news conference in Atami, South of Tokyo. "And in the House of Councillors (upper house), the coalition is an absolute minority."

"Whether you like it or not, there's a strong possibility that the lower house will be dissolved for general elections at an early date," Yamagishi said.

The head of Japan's largest organised labour federation is considered a close associate of newly-elected Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata, as well as his predecessor, Morihiro
 See Page 12 Col 6

Bhola connected with national power grid

BHOLA, Apr 26: Bhola, the country's biggest island located in the Meghna Basin, was connected with the national power grid today, fulfilling a long-felt demand of the islanders, reports BSS.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia formally switched on power supply to the island, separated from the country's mainland by the river Tetulia.

The Taka eight-crore project called the 'Patuakali-Baufal-Bhola national power grid line' has been completed in one and a half years through the setting up of a 33 KV marine cable on the river Tetulia. Local experts completed the project with the country's own
 See Page 12 Col 1

SA polls begin peacefully

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 26: Black South Africans, refusing to be cowed by terrorist threats, voted for the first time today to replace white rule with democracy and install a government headed by Nelson Mandela, reports AP.

Two days of bomb blasts that killed 21 people were no deterrent to blacks and whites who poured to polling stations in gritty townships, in leafy suburbs, and in the mountainous solitude of eastern Natal Province.

"Today is a day like no other before it," Mandela, head of the African National Congress, said in a statement to the nation. "Today marks the dawn of our freedom."

"Standing together, let us send a message loud and clear:

We will not let a handful of killers steal our democracy," said Mandela, whose ANC is expected to easily win the vote.

More than 100,000 police and army troops — well over double the number originally planned — were deployed to protect voters, who will elect a 400-seat National Assembly and a 90-seat Senate comprising legislators from the country's nine provinces.

From Canada to New Zealand, from Hong Kong to Harare, Zimbabwe, thousands of South Africans around the world cast their ballots today.

In London, a carnival atmosphere erupted in Trafalgar Square where thousands of voters snaked around the South African Embassy, the
 former focus of apartheid protests and vigils.

There was no violence and voting went smoothly around the world except in Hong Kong, where ballot papers ran out three hours before voting was supposed to end.

In South Africa, the elderly, ill and pregnant voted today. The rest of the population will vote Wednesday in neighbouring Zimbabwe, lines of up to 400 yards formed at polling booths watched by armed police.

More than 10,000 South African living in the United States were expected at 21 voting stations, including a ballroom at the Philadelphia Civic Centre.

In Canada, 12 polling sta-
 See Page 12 Col 4



A FIELD DAY: Homeless children, popularly known as tokais or urchins who usually reign over the streets during hartals, have the Bangabandhu Avenue in the heart of the capital all to themselves during yesterday's dawn-to-dusk general strike across the country. —Star photo

Democratic system in jeopardy, says Hanif

By Staff Correspondent

Dhaka Mayor and city Awami League (AL) president Mohammad Hanif yesterday said the AL will have to involve more people in its political process in the future.

"Unseating the Khaleda Zia government is not the only job of the Awami League; we have other programmes to implement after removing the government, including strengthening the democratic system in the country which is now in jeopardy," he said.

In a post-hartal rally at Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday evening Mohammad Hanif said, "We will launch a vigorous campaign in favour of our programmes."

The rally, presided over by the Mayor, was addressed by
 See Page 12 Col 3

Hartal passes off peacefully

By Staff Correspondent

The countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the major opposition parties yesterday passed off almost peacefully except for some minor clashes in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Faridpur and Madaripur.

About 20 pro-hartal activists were injured during clashes with anti-hartal groups. The largest opposition party the Awami League (AL) and the second largest opposition Jatiya Party (JP) separately called the shut-down — the second in two weeks — to press home a package of demands, including the holding of the next general elections under a caretaker government.

The port city of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Bhola town were exempted from the hartal at the request of the all

party leaders of the respective areas.

Bhola was exempted because Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was to open a power plant linking the district with the national energy grid while Chittagong and Cox's Bazar were excluded from the shutdown because the local-level units of the parties supported the unhindered holding of the traditional *Jabbar boli khela* (wrestling competition).

In the capital, all transports barring some rickshaws, remained off the streets and shops, business establishments and banks kept their shutters down. Employees and officials of the government establishments had to walk to their of-
 See Page 12 Col 4

Sher-e-Bangla's 32nd anniversary of death today

By Staff Correspondent

The 32nd anniversary of the death of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq will be observed today in the country in a befitting manner.

Different socio-cultural organisations have planned various programmes to mark the day.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas, in a message on the occasion, said the nation could pay respects to the memory of the Sher-e-Bangla by fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the people on the basis of a national consensus and continuing the process of development.

The great leader had relentlessly struggled for democracy although his life, Biswas recalled.

With Parliamentary democ-
 See Page 12 Col 7

Malaysia to import rice

Star Report

Malaysia has decided to import rice from Bangladesh, for which arrangements have already been made.

According to an official source, Malaysia will initially buy 120 tonnes of fine *Kalitra* and *Chiniqura* rice and a letter of credit was opened last week between the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) and Malaysia's National Rice and Paddy Authority (LPN), a government agency.

The FOB price has been fixed at 665 US dollars per tonne.

The deal is the culmination of negotiations which went on for about a year.

A Food Ministry official termed this as an achievement
 See Page 12 Col 8

Taiwanese air crash kills 250

KOMAKI (Japan), Apr 26: At least 250 people died when a China Airlines Airbus A-300 with 272 people on board crashed and exploded into flames while landing here this evening at Nagoya airport, officials said, reports AFP.

The officials said 11 people were still listed as missing, some four and a half hours after the crash while 11 people had survived, including one Filipino who was listed in a critical condition.

Flight CAL-140 from Taipei to Nagoya was carrying 158 Japanese and 99 foreign passengers, including two infants, plus 15 crew members.

Most of the foreigners had Chinese names and at least 45 were from Taiwan while several appeared to be Filipinos, officials said. Almost all of the

Japanese passengers were registered with various tour groups.

Some 50 fire trucks were sent to tackle the blaze, which lit up the night sky around the airport. The blaze was extinguished 40 minutes after the airliner crashed at the tip of the runway at about 8:13 pm (11:3 GMT).

The pilot reportedly told air-traffic controllers that he was planning to make a second approach about a minute before losing contact with the tower. Japan's Transport Ministry was quoted as saying, "The ministry report came about an hour before the flight and voice recorders were found."

Chang Tai-Shih, the Japan Regional Director for China Airlines, said earlier that the

plane crashed after its right wing hit the ground.

"We don't yet know the cause of the accident but we sincerely apologise," he told a news conference at Tokyo's Haneda Airport.

Chang said he could not confirm a report that passengers had been taken off the plane before it took off from Taipei because of engine trouble.

Asked if the Airbus had experience any problems before, Chang said: "We haven't heard about any major accident involving the plane in the past but we don't know all the details."

Several bodies were found strewn around a Japanese military airbase located next to the airport. The bodies were later
 See Page 12 Col 8

BDR, Myanmar infiltrators clash: 2 killed

COX'S BAZAR, Apr 26: An encounter between the BDR and armed infiltrators from Myanmar left two people killed near a border outpost in Naik-bhongchari thana of Bandarban district today, reports UNB.

The incident took place when a group of armedmen opened fire on a BDR patrol team at Monjoypara village, about 2 kms from the Myanmar border.

The BDR and police sources said a group of 10 men in their black dresses were proceeding towards Rezapara at about 5:20 am. They opened fire when the BDR patrol team challenged them.

After a half-an-hour exchange of fire, two armedmen
 See Page 12 Col 7

Poor response to Biman's 3rd tender for airbuses

By Asiuzzaman

The third attempt by Biman Bangladesh Airlines to procure two airbuses is likely to be foiled because of poor and unsubstantiated offers from the bidding companies, Biman and local agent sources said.

Three of the nine companies participating in the revised bidding claimed the ownership of the same aircraft, while the offers of other companies except one are not substantiated by necessary papers.

Only one tender offer was found technically sound although a team of engineers was examining eight offers to find out their technical viability, one Biman source said.

Despite the poor response and ownership problems, a

section of Biman executives are in favour of procuring the aircraft within the stipulated time to save the image of the national carrier because Biman had to float tenders for a third time to purchase two French-made airbuses.

During two previous attempts, Biman had wanted to take lease or hire purchase the airbus but in its third attempt the national carrier has opted to buy the midhaol aircraft A 310-300 on cash direct from the owner of the aircraft.

Nine companies sent 11 offers, of which three were rejected during the opening on April 11 because of insufficient tender documents. The three
 See Page 12 Col 7

Kidnapping charge against Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Apr 26: Police today registered a criminal case against former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the ex-interior minister for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping of a human-rights activists, the official Associated Press of Pakistan said, reports AFP.

The case was registered in Lahore High Court on a petition filed by Syed Asad Abdi, who claimed that while he was the chairman of a human-rights organisation in the industrial Punjab city of Gujranwala he was abducted on orders from Sharif while he was Prime Minister in 1992.

Abdi also implicated former Interior Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and a former police chief of Gujranwala, Malik Iqbal.

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